



Coconino County Sheriff's Office

MEDIA RELEASE

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Contacts: Gerry Blair 928-226-5089

Winter Hiking Preparedness and Safety

Flagstaff, AZ – In light of the developing tragedy in Mount Hood Oregon and the current winter weather and extreme conditions that Northern Arizona often experiences, Sheriff Bill Pribil and the men and women of the Coconino County Sheriff's Office and Coconino County Sheriff's Search and Rescue would like to remind community members of some important winter hiking safety tips.

Every outdoor activity or sport has specific risks that participants need to be aware of. Hiking can be an enjoyable activity if done under the right conditions and with appropriate training and conditioning. Winter hiking and alpine mountaineering can present a multitude of dangers for the uninformed or unprepared enthusiast

Prepare for a wilderness trip by establishing a plan and giving it to someone you can depend on. The plan should include times and dates of departure and return. It should also include when you will arrive at certain checkpoints, even if no contact is established, it will assist searchers in locating you should you need their assistance. Be aware of existing and impending weather conditions and check weather reports frequently. If extreme winter weather is predicted during the duration of your trip, cancel it.

Dress warmly in layered clothing. Layers allow you to easily adjust your clothes to regulate body moisture and temperature. Three types of layers are considered normal: a liner layer against your skin (long-johns), an insulation layer (fleece), and a water- and wind-proof outer shell. Cotton loses its insulating qualities when it gets wet, whether it is from rain or sweat. Cotton also takes a long time to dry out. Wool or synthetic materials are much better suited for cold weather conditions. Boots should have a waterproof outer shell such as oiled leather or plastic. Protect from heat loss through you head by wearing a warm stocking cap or other winter hat. Make sure socks and gloves do not fit so tight that they constrict the blood flow which keeps your hands or feet from warming up. Pack plenty of extra clothing in case you the clothes you are wearing become wet.

Keep yourself adequately nourished to provide fuel for hiking and for simply keeping your body warm. Food should be easy to prepare and tasty enough to be appetizing. Drink plenty of water even though you don't think you are thirsty. Water is necessary for your body to generate heat. A good rule of thumb for checking hydration is the color of your urine. Urine will be light colored or clear if you are properly hydrated. Keep water bottles from freezing in your pack by putting them in a wool sock or insulated bottle cover. Even for short day hikes winter outdoor enthusiasts should carry survival equipment. Essential items include fire starting equipment, a light source and extra batteries, appropriate extra clothing, water, food, navigation equipment, pocket knife, shelter materials, sunglasses or goggles, a backcountry shovel, a backpacking stove and fuel and a small metal cup.

Additionally if traveling in potentially hazardous avalanche terrain an avalanche transceiver and probe are advisable. Avalanche safety education is important for winter backcountry travel on the San Francisco Peaks. Avalanche awareness clinics are offered locally by the Kachina Peaks Avalanche Center (www.kachinapeaks.org)

- **Pre-Season Snowbowl Road Closures** Snowbowl Road may be closed on weekends when hazardous winter conditions exist and the ski area is not open or maintaining the road. Arizona Snowbowl is responsible for snowplow and cinder operations on Snowbowl Road to maintain access to the ski area under a Road Use Permit with the Coconino National Forest. Please anticipate Snowbowl Road closures on

stormy weekends until the ski area has enough snow to open.

- **Wing Mountain Snowplay Area** As soon as enough snow is on the ground for snowplay activities, the Wing Mountain Snowplay Area will be open for business. The Wing Mountain Snowplay Area is located at Wing Mountain pit on Forest Road 222B, 3 miles northwest of the Snowbowl Road junction on Highway 180. This site will be operated and managed by Recreation Resource Management under a Temporary Special Use Permit with the Coconino National Forest. The cost per vehicle is \$10.00. Services include parking management, snowplowing, restrooms, trash receptacles, and the sale of winter gear and concessions on busy weekends and holidays.
- **Seasonal Motorized Vehicle Closures** Two areas off of Highway 180 fall under a “Seasonal Motorized Wheeled Vehicle Closure” order from December 1 – March 31. The roads within these areas will be closed to wheeled vehicles as soon as enough snow falls for snowplay and other winter activities that the area is managed for. The Wing Mountain Vehicle Closure Area includes Forest Roads 222, 519, 519A and 222B beyond Wing Mountain parking area. The Seasonal Motorized Vehicle Closure surrounding the Flagstaff Nordic Center will also be enforced when enough snow arrives for ski area operations. Roads affected by this closure include Forest Road 151E.
- **Backcountry Travel**

Winter recreationists who plan on snowshoeing or skiing in backcountry areas should think “preparedness.”

The most important aspect of preparedness is to make sure someone knows exactly where you are going and how long you anticipate you will be out. Carry a map of the area you are going to, so you are familiar with the landscape.

Backcountry travel on the San Francisco Peaks requires a free annual backcountry permit, available Monday through Friday during regular business hours in Flagstaff at the Peaks Ranger Station, 5075 N. Highway 89, and Mormon Lake Ranger Station, 4373 S. Lake Mary Road. Permits will also be available at the Arizona Snowbowl Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 to 11:00 AM, in the Agassiz Lodge.

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